

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous

Guidelines for Starting an ABA Virtual Meeting¹

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People from all over the world come to the virtual meetings looking for recovery from anorexia, bulimia, and related eating disorders. If the worldwide need for recovery from eating disorders is so extensive, then starting more virtual meetings seems to be the logical solution. However, let's pause for a moment. These meetings tend to get a lot of newcomers, for whom this may be their first and only introduction to and experience of ABA. Newcomers, not-so-newcomers, and even so-called "old timers" – we all need a clear message of hope.

We who have recovered from our eating disorders find it really important to pass on this message of hope – the message about the spiritual solution of the Twelve Steps of ABA – to those still suffering. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous clearly states that, "You cannot transmit something you haven't got" (p. 164). Likewise, *Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous: The Fellowship Details its Program of Recovery for Anorexia and Bulimia* emphasizes how we can only carry the message of recovery from our eating disorders after getting sober (i.e., surrendering all control of our food, exercise, and body weight and shape to a Higher Power) and working the Twelve Steps in ABA (p. 135).

Starting a new phone or online meeting is a beautiful gift. And it is a great responsibility. We who have been involved with virtual meetings for many years recognize that starting a new meeting requires a big commitment, members with strong sobriety and a spiritual awakening as the result of working the Twelve Steps, and extensive support from the worldwide Fellowship of ABA.

Based on our hard-won experience, the Virtual-Meetings Support Committee has developed these suggestions to help members interested in starting a meeting; they are made with full appreciation of Tradition Four.

1. We who have found recovery from our eating disorders in ABA recognize the vital importance that those who come to our Fellowship find and hear a clear message of hope through ABA's unique solution of recovery. We recommend that anyone starting a new phone or online meeting has been an active ABA member for at least six to twelve months; has gotten and is staying sober by surrendering all control of food, exercise, body weight and shape to a Higher Power as described in our literature (i.e., "Step Zero" and "Getting Sober" in *Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous: The Fellowship Details Its Program of Recovery for Anorexia and Bulimia*, and "Sobriety is Surrender": What does THAT mean?" at www.aba12steps.org/documents); and is actively working the Twelve Steps with an ABA sponsor.

¹ Virtual meetings all operate on the same principle. Instead of physically going to a location where you can meet face-to-face with other members, everyone connects via telephone or online app and uses a special access code to enter the virtual meeting "room." Be aware that ABA does not have a preferred company that it uses for virtual meetings; we do not endorse outside enterprises. Each meeting and group is autonomous; when a virtual meeting is formed, those ABA members starting the meeting set it up on a virtual meeting service of their choosing.

2. We highly recommend that you regularly attend existing virtual meetings and their business meetings for several months. This way you can gain experience and see how they operate. Participating in existing meetings can help you discern whether there is a true need for a new meeting or if your effort is better spent in supporting an existing one.
3. In our experience, starting a new virtual meeting requires a significant amount of intensive work and deep commitment. For a meeting to flourish, we have found that it needs at least two to four sober ABA members with the time and availability to commit to the meeting for at least six months.
4. Having good support is really important when starting a new virtual meeting. We recommend that anyone interested in starting a virtual meeting attend and get involved with the Virtual-Meetings Support Committee. This committee has the primary purpose of helping existing and new virtual meetings.
5. ABA has developed many helpful documents that are available for a donation at www.aba12steps.org. We especially recommend the following documents when considering starting a new meeting: “ABA General Information,” “Twelve FAQs for Newcomers,” “Guidelines for Attending Virtual Meetings,” “‘Sobriety is Surrender’: What does THAT mean?,” “ABA Preamble for Meetings,” “ABA Spoken Here Card,” “Guidelines for Group Operation,” and “Meetings, Groups & Home Groups.”
6. It is strongly encouraged that all meetings use the “ABA Preamble for Meetings” as the meeting format. This document can be found in the ABA textbook (pp.142-148) and under the Documents tab on the ABA website www.aba12steps.org. Please note that the the page immediately preceding the Preamble (p 141) contains this statement: “Notwithstanding the copyright laws that apply to everything in this textbook, the authors and publisher hereby grant blanket permission to any ABA member or group to copy the next seven pages containing the Preamble for Meetings, as long as it is reproduced in its entirety and is not otherwise altered.”
7. We encourage anyone considering starting a new meeting to contact the General Service Association (GSA) of ABA for more information.

Email: gsaoffice@aba12steps.org

Phone number: +1-780-318-6355

If you decide to start a new virtual meeting, we hope to see you at the Virtual-Meetings Support Committee. If you decide not to start one now, rest assured that there are plenty of opportunities to be of service in ABA. Existing meetings can always use more support and the Virtual-Meetings Support Committee and other ABA committees are always looking for more sober ABA members.